**EDP Consultation Team**
**Natural England**
nrfconsultation@naturalengland.org.uk
By email

Monday 26 October 2026

Dear EDP Consultation Team,

**Re: Nutrient Pollution – draft Norfolk Environmental Delivery Plan consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft Norfolk Environmental Delivery Plan.

We welcome the rapid publication of this draft and the ambition to take a more strategic, catchment-scale approach to addressing increased nutrient pollution due to development affecting the Norfolk Broads and the River Wensum. We also welcome the prospect of new funding through the Nature Restoration Fund to support conservation and nature recovery measures.

However, we have significant concerns about the plan's approach to pollution reduction, its ability to deliver a material improvement in the condition of the protected sites, and the financial viability of the proposed measures over the long term.

**Lack of consideration for nutrient reduction at source.**

We are concerned that the draft EDP does not adequately consider how nutrient pollution could be reduced before relying on habitat creation and restoration to compensate for additional nutrients.

The draft plan identifies agriculture as a major source of nutrient pollution in the affected catchments. Yet, agricultural management measures are largely excluded from the proposed programme. There needs to be scope for selection of additional schemes or farm-level action and other nutrient reduction measures before mitigation and compensation are selected, in line with the Environmental Delivery Plans (Appropriate Prioritisation) Regulations 2026.

For example, we struggle to understand how, in Table 6, riparian buffer strips to intercept nutrients from agriculture, which have a strong evidence base, are discounted as a measure to reduce nutrient loading, but deer management, with a less direct relationship to reducing nutrient load and poorer evidence, is not. Similarly, grey solutions such as upgrading inefficient

septic tanks and package treatment plants which would result in direct upstream reduction in nutrient load are also discounted, in favour of downstream compensation measures.

We recognise that habitat restoration can provide significant ecological benefits, and we welcome the conservation measures already proposed. However, these benefits should not be treated as a substitute for reducing nutrient load (which is the EDP's stated aim) by preventing avoidable pollution. The current approach is counter to the Government's targets in nutrient reduction and will potentially cause an increase in water treatment costs as nutrients need to be removed from raw drinking water sources. The EDP should demonstrate transparently how prioritisation has informed the selection of measures, including how opportunities to prevent nutrient pollution have been assessed against alternative interventions.

**Uncertainty over material improvement.**

We are not convinced that the draft EDP provides sufficient evidence that its proposed measures will materially outweigh the negative effects of development. The draft plan would enable 15,780 new homes with additional nutrient loading in the immediate future whilst the benefits of compensation measures may take years to become fully effective after irreversible damage may have already been caused.

We welcome the ambition of the draft EDP to deliver wider environmental improvements across the catchments. However, we remain concerned that it would permit additional nutrient inputs to protected catchments that are already heavily polluted and where many designated features remain in unfavourable condition. In this already pressured catchment, further enrichment could trigger algal blooms, ecological tipping points and damage that may be difficult or impossible to reverse. While the plan relies on wider habitat improvements to deliver an overall environmental benefit, it also acknowledges that residual phosphorus and nitrogen inputs from new development will continue despite implementation of the proposed conservation measures.

Although relatively small compared with existing catchment-wide nutrient loads, these inputs must be considered against the substantial reductions needed for ecological recovery. We would welcome greater clarity on how residual nutrient loading has been assessed against site-specific restoration requirements, taking account of cumulative pressures from agriculture, wastewater and other pollution sources, as well as the risk of deterioration before planned improvements take effect. Greater emphasis should also be placed on reducing nutrients at source, ensuring development supports rather than risks delaying the recovery of protected sites.

The draft EDP's Overall Improvement Test is central to its justification and relies too heavily on qualitative red-amber-green assessments and 'expert' judgement. The methodology does not provide a sufficiently quantified threshold for passing any test, nor does it consistently

demonstrate any relationship between measures and expected reductions in nutrient load (if any) or ecological outcomes.

We recommend that Natural England establish a transparent and quantified evidence base for the measures proposed and maps reductions attributable to each intervention, with realistic delivery dates, confidence ranges and feature-specific ecological indicators. A science-based threshold for passing the Overall Improvement Test should be defined clearly with safeguards to ensure that improvement in a downstream habitat is not used to conceal upstream increases in nutrient pollution. There should additionally be clear, stated triggers for intervention where monitoring indicates that measures are failing to reduce nutrient load.

**Financial viability and long-term maintenance.**

We welcome Natural England's intention to secure and maintain conservation measures for at least 100 years. However, the draft EDP does not provide sufficient confidence that the proposed funding arrangements will be adequate to maintain the promised outcomes over this period.

The proposed levy of £2,675 per dwelling plus indexation requires justification. The plan does not provide detailed intervention-level and whole-life costings to demonstrate that the levy will cover implementation, management, maintenance, monitoring and contingency measures. We are concerned that the proposed levy is too low to cover the costs of the measures proposed. The draft EDP should detail how costs have been mapped and determined. The proposed levy calculations would also benefit from a more transparent breakdown of risks involved, including lower-than-expected uptake, sudden increases in delivery costs, as well as intervention or project failure.

We also question whether a uniform levy per dwelling is an appropriate basis for allocating costs. The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 indicates that the amount of development may be specified in any way that Natural England considers appropriate. This could include measurements of floor space, or expected residential population increases. The EDP should explain why an equal charge is justified and proportionate and whether a more representative measure of nutrient impact would provide a fairer and more robust basis for charging. In particular, it should consider whether larger homes or developments with greater expected occupancy could generate higher nutrient load - and therefore justify an increased imposed levy.

**Undermining of nature markets.**

We are concerned that the draft EDP risks undermining confidence and investment in emerging nature markets, particularly existing nutrient mitigation schemes. [1] recognises a £10 million

[1] Natural England Annual Report and Accounts 2025 to 2026

permanent diminution in the value of its nutrient mitigation credits, citing reduced market demand and the Nature Restoration Fund. Whilst this relates to Natural England's own scheme, the proposed levy, which is substantially below the cost of many private mitigation schemes risks further displacing investment and reducing demand for schemes which are already delivering environmental outcomes. The EDP should complement rather than undermine existing nature markets and private investment needed to support long term nature recovery.

**Improvement of this and future plans.**

We encourage Natural England to use feedback from this consultation for future EDP drafts. In summary, the revised Norfolk EDP and subsequent EDPs should:

- Prioritise the avoidance of nutrient pollution at source, with clear justification for the rejection of reduction measures in favour of mitigation and compensation, reflecting statutory prioritisation;
- Demonstrate how proposed measures will deliver material remediation of increased pollution as the result of development, not just unrelated ecosystem improvement;
- Establish clear delivery commitments, outcome-based monitoring, transparent reporting and enforceable triggers for early corrective action; and
- Publish realistic, robust and mapped whole-life costings and demonstrate that the levy imposed will adequately fund implementation, maintenance, monitoring and contingency measures.

Yours sincerely,

**Tessa Wardley**
Director of Communications & Advocacy
The Rivers Trust